

BOBBY L. RUSH
1ST DISTRICT, ILLINOIS



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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

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October 26, 2021

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20530-0009

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20535-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland and Director Wray:

I write to you about a matter of grave concern, both to me and to our Nation, regarding the circumstances surrounding the death of 25-year-old Illinois State University graduate student, Jelani Day. As you may know, Day was reported missing on August 25, 2021, less than 24 hours after he disappeared. While police found his car two days later and recovered his body from the Illinois River near Peru, Illinois on September 4, 2021, it took an additional 19 excruciating days and a plethora of public outrage before his body was identified. As I learned the details of Day's case, I was reminded of the lynching of Emmett Till, whose body was found floating in a river in 1955 and still, decades later, no one has been held legally accountable for his death. The circumstances surrounding Day's death are strikingly similar to past lynchings of Black Americans, both male and female.

In a similar case, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been leading the investigation into the disappearance of Gabby Petito, who went missing around the same time as Jelani Day. While the outcome was also unfortunate and tragic, I am hopeful that having received timely answers will provide her family a level of comfort and closure. Appropriately, the FBI has aggressively pursued justice for Petito, and Day's family deserves the same urgency as they continue to seek answers to the many questions surrounding his tragic death.

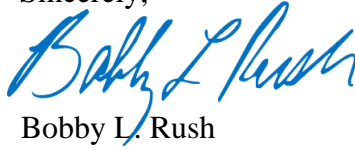
It is far too often the case that the police and media response around missing people of color, specifically Black Americans, is often slow, fleeting, and apathetic. Since August 2021, 24 Black men have been reported missing, and families like those of Daniel Robinson, Douglas Graham Wesbee, Wilfred Kennerson III, and numerous others are seeking answers to the unusual circumstances surrounding their disappearances. All of this is occurring in an era where, according to the 2020 FBI crime data, hate crimes against Black Americans have increased by nearly 40 percent. Across the country, Black people make up nearly 30 percent of missing persons reports but only 13 percent of the U.S. population. Additionally, children of color are often initially

classified as runaways, rather than missing, meaning that they do not receive a timely Amber Alert that is all too often critical to solving these types of cases.

The urgency of these cases and our continued shared interest in justice are the most compelling reasons to launch a Federal investigation into the disappearance and death of Jelani Day and the increased number of victims of color around the country. It is critical that you do everything in your power to ensure that all missing people are afforded the same level of attention, regardless of their race.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you or your staff should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bobby L. Rush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bobby" being more prominent.

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Kristen Clarke

Assistant Attorney General, US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division